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A STUDY OF AMOS'S NOTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH
IN KOREAN SOCIETY

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Introduction

The root of the Korean church's powerlessness when it comes to many problems in its society is to be found in the false consciousness that religion is a private matter between an individual and God. The role of the church in society has been understood as giving a place for refuge and saving people from the wicked world. In the whirlpool of political marginalization and socio-economic stratification of the last few decades, however, the Korean church itself has grown explosively without facing the socio-economic realities. Furthermore, while the mainstream of the Korean church has been growing, the marginalized people in Korea have been suffering political oppression, economic exploitation, and socio-cultural discrimination.

A similar situation was going on in the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century B.C.E. In a time of national revival and economic boom, Israelites were celebrating their prosperity and victory among the nations. They believed their present prosperity was the special blessing of God and was permanently guaranteed by their God. However, the prophet Amos broke the false traditionalism of national security and saw their present prosperity as the major reason for the coming of the divine doom. Amos used sacred apodictic law in accordance with his notion of justice for proclaiming the message of doom. Amos's accusations were to point out the socio-economic exploitations and oppressions which were imposed on the poor peasants who were vindicated by Yahweh of justice.

In my view, the Korean church should take a great sense of responsibility for the socio-economic injustices and should turn to be an

important agent for social change in accordance with the justice of God. In doing so, what is the firm foundation of the role of the Korean church? What could the Korean church learn for its role in the society from Amos's notion of social justice? What is the social implication of the role of the Korean church in Korean society?

For my M.A. thesis, I want to study the prophet Amos's notion of social justice for the change of Korean society in connection to the Korean church's role in its society. I want to read the book of Amos with Korean *minjung*'s eyes and want to hear what Amos might speak to recent Korean society with *minjung*'s ears. This study of Amos's notion of justice will not only give insightful implications for the role of the Korean church as regards its socio-economic injustices, but also will provide one of the strongest prophetic messages for establishing the justice of God on behalf of Korean *minjung*.

First, an overview of my thesis. Chapter one deals with the recent social history of Korea and its relation to the Korean church, especially focusing on the undemocratic political vestiges and marginalization, economic stratification and undemocratization, the social retrogressive tendency of public welfare within the period of the 1980s and early 1990s, the Fifth and Sixth Republic. Chapter two attempts to present the social history of the northern kingdom of Israel in the first half of the eighth century B.C.E., i.e., the social, economic and political structures and conditions in ancient Israel, comparing tribal Israel to Israel under the monarchy and the social location of Amos and his relation to *minjung*. Chapter three deals with the message of Amos and his notion of justice. Chapter Four examines question of what the Korean church could learn about her role in society

from the message of Amos. The conclusion gives the relevance of Amos's message in modern Korea.

The result of this study cannot claim to be conclusive or definitive because no single work can explore all of the social dimensions. It is only hoped that this study will encourage further discussion and study, and make a little contribution to the ongoing *Minjung* theological research of the Hebrew Bible in modern Korea.

Statement of the Problem in Korean Society

The civilian, democratic administration of President Kim Young Sam, inaugurated in 1993, began sweeping reforms to achieve a "New Korea", providing a good life for its people. However, Korean society seems to be in a time of great crisis and there is criticism about what is happening in the 'New Korea'. Recently, some special terms that express the contemporary Korean sociopolitical situation, and have become well known to Koreans, are "wholistic crisis situation", or "wholistic tumultuous time". This comes from understanding the serious social situation of anomie with increasing anxiety, tension, conflict, and disaffection.

In addition, serious "man-made disasters" caused by mental laxity, negligence and irresponsibility took place everywhere in a series of disastrous accidents since president Kim Young-Sam's administration was inaugurated. Part of the Songsu Bridge, a major bridge crossing the Han River in Seoul, collapsed during the morning rush hour October 21, 1994, killing 32 people and injuring 17 others.¹⁾ When the Mugunghwa Express

train, bound for Taegu from Pusan and carrying some 200 people, ran a stop signal and slammed into the south-bound Mugunghwa train on August 12, four people were killed and 190 others were injured.²⁾ Only a day earlier, a Korean Air(KAL) Airbus 300 passenger jet with 160 passengers and crew aboard burst into flames after it skidded off the runway while landing in strong winds and rain on the southern island of Cheju.³⁾ Fortunately, all passengers and crewmen escaped to safety from the plane which was engulfed in flames. A fire broke out on a sailing excursion boat carrying 131 people at Chungju Lake in the central part of the country, killing and injuring many passengers on October 25.⁴⁾ An underground gas explosion at a Taegu subway construction site on April 28, just five months after an earlier Ahyon-dong gas explosion in Seoul, made victims of 101 morning commuters, including scores of young students going to school.⁵⁾ Just two months later on June 29 the posh five-story shopping center, Sampoong Department Store, in the affluent suburb of Socho-dong in Seoul collapsed.⁶⁾ In an instant a total of 502 evening shoppers and salespersons were killed, 937 injured and five others listed missing. Moreover, a huge oil tanker, the Sea Prince, went aground on a reef while escaping from a storm on July 23, leaking 700 tons of Bunker-C oil into the clean waters there.⁷⁾ The black oil spill completely devastated the fishing farms off Yochon, causing damage worth 150 million won (about 200 million dollars), and

1 Korea Times, October 22, 1994: 1

2 Korea Times, August 12, 1994: 3

3 Korea Times, August 11, 1994: 3

4 Korea Times, October 25, 1994: 3

5 Korea Times, April 28, 1995: 1

6 Korea Times, June 29, 1995: 1

7 Korea Times, July 23, 1995: 1

threatening the livelihood of fishermen.

This wave of terrible accidents in Korea jolted not only the nation, but also the whole world, confirming Korea's nickname, the "Republic of Disasters."⁸⁾ A lack of safety consciousness, negligence, irresponsibility, and poor supervision combined to cause the "man-made disasters" that made Koreans blush with shame before the world.

Furthermore, the Korean people have been petrified and appalled by the outbreaks of crime in recent years. A cab driver repeatedly abducted women who would be his rape and murder victims without any clear motive other than his plan to become the "most notorious murderer in the world".⁹⁾ A gambler killed his girlfriend and stole her money in order to pay off his debts.¹⁰⁾ Without hesitation a worker vengefully murdered all of his incriminating witnesses. A young son killed his wealthy father and mother to pay gambling debts.¹¹⁾ A six-criminal gang, called the "Chijon Family", all in their twenties, committed "inhumane" crimes by killing five innocent people in a "cold-blooded" manner. They dismembered and burned their victims' bodies in the incinerator of the house, and they even ate a piece of flesh from the body of a victim in order to give up being a human being. The gang allegedly told the police that they committed the murders out of "resentment and hatred" toward a society which seems to put high values only on wealth, and so chose wealthy victims.¹²⁾ While people were unable to forget the unbelievable rampant disasters and crimes, the bombshell

8 Korea Times, December 21, 1995: 5

9 The Korea Herald, October 2, 1994: 5

10 The Korea Herald, October 21, 1994: 5

11 Ibid.

12 The Korea Herald, September 22, 1994: 3

arrest of two former presidents also made headlines across the globe, shaming all Koreans. The entire world is keeping an eye on the progress of the two ex-presidents' astronomical slush fund. This secret fund scandal, perhaps, seems to be related to deep-rooted structural, systematic injustice of the Korean society.

What is the real source of this unprecedented crisis and the deep-rooted corruption of Korean society? There is no simple explanation. There are many diagnoses of the real cause of the situation of revolutionary anomie: blindness to crime, ethical anarchy, absence of morals, social disarray, economic ruin, political marginalization, cultural deterioration. Some sociologists diagnose it as a result of the "morality crisis" facing Korean society. They say that the rapid economic growth and the commensurate social changes in Korean society during the past 20 to 30 years have to some extent diluted the traditional virtues, such as filial piety and respect for the aged, and new values including mammon-worship and extreme selfishness have been replacing them.¹³⁾ The political scientists' diagnosis is that corruption exists in Korean society because of the long history of the bureaucratic-authoritarian military rule and the abnormal development of political parties.¹⁴⁾ The economists say that the state-centered economic development-first policy and success produced a serious crisis of unbalanced society, and failed to set up economic democratization and distributive justice. Moreover, there is the problem of the giant enterprises - - the

13 Lee, Won Gue, The Reality and Prospect of the Korean Church (Korean)(Seoul: The Bible Institute Publishing, 1994), 35.

14 Park, Byeong Seog, "Political Corruption in South Korea: Concentrating on the Dynamics of Party Politics", Asian Perspective Vol. 19, No. 1 Spring-Summer 1995 (Seoul: The Institute for Far Eastern Studies Kyungnam University, 1995), 164-165.

large, family-owned or family-controlled industrial-business conglomerates who have continued to maintain a lopsided concentration of national wealth and monopolistic power.¹⁵⁾

While Korean society has been changing rapidly since the 1960s, Korean churches have achieved explosive growth, too. Nobody can deny that Korean churches have been miraculously growing in quantity and that this is unparalleled in world church history. However, this growth in quantity does not match well with Korea's sociopolitical crisis and economic undemocratization. One fourth of the population is "Christian", but the nation experienced strong dehumanization and sociopolitical injustices. There is a great gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" and as it gets bigger and bigger, the society has been suffering the deep social diseases mentioned earlier. One of the significant matters of growth is the role of the church in Korean society. A good number of Korean ministers are more interested in fame and material success than in authentic Christian ministry, tending to neglect the other dimensions of the church's role in the special setting of Korean society. They have produced "the cheap gospel of health and wealth" and there is a strong principle of the separation of politics from religion. They think that "religion and politics cannot mix at all"¹⁶⁾ and that religion is a private matter between the individual and God.

If the churches in Korea do not want to fail to respond to this unprecedented social illness and crisis as a demand of God toward them,

15 Kim, Sang Joon, "Characteristic Features of Korean Democratization", Asian Perspective, Vol. 18, No. 2 Fall-Winter 1994 (Seoul: The Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University, 1994), 192.

16 Brown, Robert McAfee, The Bible Speaks to You (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 283.

they first must become responsible. They must ask themselves what is the role of the church in the society of which they are a part, and they should offer divine direction because the crisis is not only sociopolitical or economical, but also spiritual. In order to do this, the Korean church needs to be enlightened by the message of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, especially Amos, the prophet of justice. This will elevate the Korean church to a prophetic function in society, and let her direct society toward a new vision of an alternative society that previously had been modeled by Yahweh of justice.

Definitions

1. Minjung

The word *minjung*(민중 : 民衆) is unique to the Korean language. For non-Koreans, it is difficult to understand fully the meaning of the word *minjung* so it remains untranslated. The word "minjung" is a Korean pronunciation of two Chinese characters : *min*(민 : 民) and *jung*(중 : 衆). *Minjung*(민중 : 民衆) does not mean "*paiksung*(백성 : 百姓) which means the subjects in a monarchy in English, nor does it mean "*daejung*"(대중 : 大衆) which means "mass" and has an impersonal and non-political connotation. *Min* literally means the "people" and *jung* denotes "the mass". We get the idea of "the mass people" or simply "the people" by combining these two words. However, unlike "the people" in English, *minjung* is not a generic word equivalent to "human beings", nor does it refer to all the inhabitants or natives of a given country as the English word "population"

does, nor does it refer to an ethnic entity such as is meant by the German word *Volk*. Therefore, this simple translation ("the people") does not fully reflect what is meant by the term to Koreans. *Minjung* is not a concept or object which can be easily defined or categorized.

Minjung expresses a living reality which is a holistic, dynamic and changing concept. Especially it escapes categorization and transcends fixed formulae for once it is subjected to definition, it becomes the victim of ideology and the object of speculation.¹⁷⁾ The *minjung* can talk about itself only through its social and political biography.¹⁸⁾ *Minjung* is a very inclusive word which includes different social, political, cultural and intellectual conditions. It denotes all the common people who have been regarded as the subject of Korean history. They are politically oppressed, economically exploited, socially marginalized, and culturally despised and ignored.

The *minjung* is different from the concept of the *proletariat* in Marxist thought because proletariat is too narrowly ideological and economic, but the *minjung* as historical subject transcends the socio-economic determination of history.¹⁹⁾ And also, there is a difference between the reality of the *minjung* and the Maoist notion of *inmin*(인민 : 人民), meaning people in the sense when used in the People's Republic of . . . Furthermore, *inmin* is also narrowly ideological and political, however *minjung* politics is contrary to the total dictatorship which is an integral

17 Ahn, Byung Mu, *Minjung Theology Story* (Korean) (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1988), 27.

18 Kim, Yong Bock, "Messiah and Minjung: Discerning Messianic Politics over against Political Messianism", *Minjung Theology People as the Subjects of History* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 184.

19 Ibid.

part of Maoism.²⁰⁾ *Minjung* history never allows the glorification or absolutization of the *minjung* so that its name may be used to justify any kind of political dictatorship.

When we say that the *minjung* are the subject of history, it does not refer to the *minjung* in political terms. Instead it confirms the *minjung*'s authentic identity within their history in order to refuse to be condemned to the fate of being objects of manipulation and suppression. The *minjung* are not yet fully the subjects of history. However, their subjectivity is being realized through the *minjung* liberation movement against the present oppressive power structures.²¹⁾ By *minjung* we can think of the poor peasants who are squeezed out of the farm, young industrial workers who are forced to work under inhuman conditions, the inner-city poor who are struggling to survive in squatters' areas under the ever present threat of eviction: day laborers, peddlers, hawkers, swindlers, junk collectors, rag and waste-paper collectors, hoodlums, prostitutes, pimps, bar girls, etc.²²⁾ Women belong to *minjung* when they are dominated by men. A race also belongs to *minjung* when it is discriminated against by another dominant ruling race. An ethnic group is a *minjung* when it is politically dominated by another powerful group.²³⁾ The kind of people we call *minjung* are referred to in the Bible as sojourner, widows, orphans, sinner, tax-collectors, lepers, and so on.

20 Ibid., 185.

21 Kim, Young Bock, op. cit., 186.

22 Hyun, Young Hak, "Three Talks on Minjung Theology" *Inter Religio* Newsletter No.7 Spring 1985, (Seoul, Institute for Theological Research, 1985), 13-14.

23 Kim, Yong Bock, op.cit., 185.

2. Minjung Theology

Minjung theology is a Korean theology. The expression "**minjung** theology" was born sometime during the first half of 1979 in Korea.²⁴⁾ It is an accumulation and articulation of theological reflections on the socio-political experiences of Christian students, laborers, the press, professors, farmers, writers, intellectuals as well as theologians in Korea in the 1970s. **Minjung** theology is an outcome of those Christians who had committed themselves to the struggle of the **minjung** for justice. They were forced to reflect upon their Christian discipleship in basement interrogation rooms, in trials, facing court-martial tribunals, hearing the allegations of prosecutors, and in making their own final defense.

Minjung theology is a sociopolitical hermeneutics of the Bible from the viewpoint of the experience of **minjung** suffering. It shows that the biblical message cannot be fully understood until we understand the history of the **minjung**, because the history of the **minjung** has its roots in the Bible. Like most Third World theologies, **Minjung** theology is a contextual theology. The basic hermeneutical task of **Minjung** theology is not to interpret the Bible (the text) in the light of the Korean situation (the context), but to interpret the suffering experience of the Korean **Minjung** (the context) in the light of the Bible (the text). The major source of **Minjung** theology is the experience of the **minjung**. This experience has two parts: one is **minjung**'s contemporary experience and the other one is their past experiences which is so called "the social biography of Korean **minjung**."²⁵⁾ Through the "social biography of the **minjung**" they can

24 Hyun, Young Hak, op. cit., 12.

transcend the socio-economic determination of history and also can move to a newly transformed history beyond the present oppressive existing structures. This transformation as the self-transcendence of the *minjung* then becomes a means of leading people to consciousness, which is different from the false consciousness of modern ideology, and which identifies with the suffering people and then serves them in hope for their liberation.

Minjung theology also can be understood as a storytelling theology, 26) stories that are about the actual events of liberation. The *minjung* use stories to understand how God is acting in their lives. *Minjung* theologians have found that the stories of the *minjung* are the tools which effectively unmask the structure of a deeply oppressive society. Stories contain the history of the suffering *minjung*, their courageous resistance for justice liberation, and the vision of a new society. *Minjung* theology includes two types of stories: the *silhwa* which means "the real story" and *mindam* which is "folk tales" in English. It is not always possible to distinguish between the *silhwa* and *mindam*. 27) They are both effective tools that disclose the intimate feelings, profane language, and oppressive conditions of the *minjung* in a realistic way. The stories convey the cultural as well as the sociopolitical biography of the *minjung*.

25 Kim, Young Bock, The Social Biography of Korean Minjung (Korean)(Seoul: Hankil Press, 1987), 14-15.

26 Lee, Jung Young, "Minjung Theology: A Critical Introduction", An Emerging Theology in World Perspective Commentary on Korean Minjung Theology (Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), 16.

27 Ibid., 17.

Chapter I

Recent Social History of Korea

Korean political history has been soiled with despotism. In its short 48 years of constitutional history, as of 1996 the nation has had seven presidents - Rhee SyngMan, Yun Po-Sun, Park Chung-Hee, Choi Kyu-Hah, Chun Doo-Hwan, Roh Tae-Woo and the incumbent Kim Young-Sam.

All of the ex-presidents, except for Yun, have been unable to avoid miserable dishonor in the course of stepping down or after retiring. The nation's first president, Rhee SyngMan, after 12 years in power, went into exile in Hawaii after stepping down from the presidency in the April 19, 1960 Student Revolution stirred up by the March 15 election rigging in that year.²⁸⁾ The second president Yun Po-Sun, elected in the National Assembly under the parliamentary cabinet system as a symbolic head of state, was also an unhappy president. Just one year after he took office, a military coup led by Park Chung-Hee overthrew the Democratic Party government. Yun lost twice to Park in later presidential elections.²⁹⁾

The third president, Park Chung-Hee, who came to power in the coup of May 16, 1961, met the most tragic fate when, on October 26, 1979, he was slain by his top aide Kim Jae-Kyu, the director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, ending his 18-year dictatorship. Park's death put an end to the era of "Yushin" or revitalizing reform, marked by long-term development and dictatorship.³⁰⁾ Park's oppression of opposition

28 Macdonald, Donald S., "South Korea's Politics Since Liberation" Korea Briefing 1993 (Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 24.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 26.

politicians and students struggling for the nation's democratization against his dictatorship finally touched off the "Pu-Ma Incident", a massive demonstration of students and citizens in Pusan and Masan in October 1979, which eventually led to his assassination. The presidency then passed to prime minister Choi Kyu-Hah who became no more than a figurehead as interim president. He had to step down in favor of another general-turned-power-seeker, Chun Doo-Hwan, closing his reign of ten months as president.³¹⁾

The fifth president, Chun Doo-Hawn, taking advantage of the power vacuum, took power through the December 12 coup one-and-a-half months after the death of Park. On the evening of that day, Chung Seoung-Hwa, the four-star army chief of staff and martial law commander, was abducted at his official residence by a team of officers dispatched by the Defense Security Command headed by Chun Doo-Hawm, a two-star general. On May 17, 1980, martial law, which had been in force in limited areas, was extended to the entire country. Subsequently, all political activities were banned and the universities were closed.³²⁾ For about 10 days between May 18 and 27, bloody atrocities and massacre were committed against civilians in Kwangju. Thousands of the best trained soldiers, paratroopers who were equipped to conduct guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines, brutally crushed untrained citizens and bayoneted many people, including young students, to death.³³⁾

In the process of forcibly usurping power, 57 military accomplices

31 Ibid.

32 Kim, Byong Kuk, "Construction of Justice" Korea Times December 20, 1995: 5

33 Kim, Boyong Kuk, "May 18, Infamous Day of Atrocities and Massacre" Korea Times December 6, 1995: 5

and followers joined Chun, including Roh Tae-Woo who became another general-turned-president seven years later. They were all members of "Hana-hoe", the secret fraternity of Army officers, which Chun himself organized and used in his quest for power. Their disgraceful deeds included the December 12, 1979, insurrection and their crackdown on the civil uprising in Kwangju in May, 1980.

How could such cold-blooded atrocities and indiscriminate killing be committed by Koreans against Koreans? Up to now, however, only fragments of facts were revealed here and there, but the full picture has been tightly hidden. Furthermore, it is unknown who ordered the indiscriminate firing against the civilians. The Kwangju incident and the military mutiny were continuations of a premeditated plot in a scenario of usurpation of state power by Chun and his military accomplices. After rewriting the Constitution, Chun was elected president again for a single seven-year term in 1981. His regime was virtually the same as the Third and Fourth Republics in its autocratic governing through military power.

Roh was elected in 1987 as the president of the Sixth Republic. Roh declared the opening of an "era of ordinary people" and repeatedly stressed that he would flatly reject any privilege or corruption during his term. However no one believes that the Sixth Republic succeeded in its major work, and it is well-known that the Sixth Republic was the Fifth Republic. It was tragic for the nation that three Army generals captured power through military coups and ruled the country for more than 30 years from 1961 to 1993.

Recently, however, Korea is crashing about in a historic whirlpool of social and moral upheaval. Two of the three former presidents still alive

have been arrested for criminal acts, and all the nation is paying strict attention to the historic trial of former presidents Roh and Chun. Roh Tae-Woo has become the nation's first former president to be arrested for criminal acts committed while in office. He is accused of taking at least 283.8 billion won (370 million dollars) in bribes from 35 business tycoons while he was serving as president of the Republic from 1988-1993. He was arrested on November 16, 1995.³⁴⁾ Chun was also arrested on December 3, 1995,³⁵⁾ and became the second former president put behind bars. With his successor Roh, Chun also has been censured for having led the mutiny in the aftermath of the assassination of President Park Chung-Hee.

Corruption related to political funding is nothing new. A common saying is that "money and politics are two sides of the same coin." Collecting slush funds in the name of "governing funds" has been routinized under the military regimes. Industrialists who failed to donate sums deemed adequate by the president were vulnerable to many forms of reaction, ranging from aggressive tax audits to denial of credit, to refusal to license new lines of business, to - in extreme cases - forcible expropriation. Roh and his predecessor Chun regularly accepted bribes from the business groups in the name of political funds, or kickbacks in exchange for contracts for government projects.

There is a collusive link or a corruptive tie between those in power and big business. Donations from business interests are directly and indirectly encouraged by tax deductions and tacit promises of other preferential treatment. Furthermore, the major sources of the "black money"

34 Korea Times, 17 November 1995: 1

35 Korea Times, 4 December 1995: 1

come from large, family-controlled conglomerates which want to maintain friendly relations with the government, and from industrialists involved in such mega-projects as the high-speed rail line and the new international airport, as well as from local and foreign suppliers to the multi-billion dollar military buildup. Their illegal donations have produced bad economic results by raising production costs. They also have led to the production of low-quality goods to save costs. Moreover, this economic corruption relating to the abuse of political funds can result in injury to the public interest. The political parties, which have developed abnormally, suffer a loss of trust from the people of the nation. The greater the degree of government intervention in economic and social processes, the greater the potential for corruption and the more difficult the task of controlling corruption through legal instruments.

Through the bombshell revelation of the nation's largest-ever payoff scandal, the traditional collusive ties between politicians and conglomerates were exposed as a "cluster of corruption" in Korean society. For illegal political funding, the statute of limitations is set at three years. So, ex-president Chun could avoid prosecution when the donations were made before 1990. According to the prosecution, 35 business tycoons gave 283.8 billion won (\$370 million) to Roh during his 1988-93 presidential term.³⁶⁾ The real-name financial transaction system, which has been introduced since August 1993, played a key role in bringing the two former presidents to justice. Roh's huge secret funds had been well hidden, but he was put behind bars when his borrowed-name bank accounts were discovered. However, under the real-name system, the disgraced former president was

36 Korea Times, 18 November 1995: 1

able to withdraw tens of billions of won from his borrowed-name accounts with help of business tycoons. This fact made the people wonder if the real-name system is indeed instrumental in blocking the flow of "black money".

Concerning the question of how the astronomical slush fund was raised, there were some close aides who played a key role in helping the notorious politics-business ties. Especially, the banker-turned-former lawmaker, Lee Won-Joe, often called the "king of the financial circle" was a close aide to two former presidents, Chun and Roh, and he had been deeply involved in presidential campaign funding and money laundering. However, many still do not know how the "black money" was raised, how it was managed and used, but only know the tip of the iceberg. It is true that even under the real-name financial transaction system, banking institutions have become hiding places for dirty money. By strong political pressure and bank managers' desire to attract as many deposits as possible, the banks participated in hiding the money and conspired in illicit deals. Therefore we would say that political corruption related to political funds and financial illness has accelerated.

Under the state-centered economic development policy of military regimes, the rapid economic success brought about a crisis of the unbalanced development of Korean society. Especially "*Chaebol*", which are the large family-owned or family-controlled industrial-business conglomerates, are creatures of the era of military rule and its program of rapid industrialization and economic growth. The thirty largest conglomerates account for 50 percent of Korea's GNP and 60 percent of its exports.³⁷⁾ This kind of lopsided concentration of wealth in the hands of a

few remains one of the most serious social problems in Korea.

The growth-first policy of the military rulers had failed to deal with the issue of wealth distribution and economic justice. The growing inequalities of distribution have been justified in the name of national economic independence. However, this economic independence was dependent upon foreign capital and technology and this kind of dependence put Korea in a subordinate relationship to multinational corporations. Furthermore, the strong "developmental state" of the military has left a large number of aggrieved, exploited *minjung*. However, Korea's military elite, technocrats and upper bourgeoisie have continued to maintain many privileges and have promoted worse socio-economic and political injustices in a variety of ways: the disruptive democratic consolidation and reproduction of the bureaucratic-authoritarian system; an extremely lopsided concentration of wealth and widening gap between the haves and the have-nots; a deepening of the socio-economic gap between the rural and urban areas; rapid urbanization and massive migration; and sacrifice of the rights and welfare of workers and farmers, etc. In order to maintain miraculous economic growth, the military government used the policy of low wages for labor and low prices for agricultural products. While the working stratum was oppressed, abused and inhumanly treated, domestic giant enterprises could continue their economic enlargement, and the military government could continue its economic miracle.

Moreover, during the past authoritarian regimes, state functionaries and a few privileged persons with access to non-public information were

widely believed to exploit such inside information to reap windfall profits of various sorts. Because such people made use of pseudonyms or nominees to hide their dealings and to evade income taxation on their gains, it was difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the scale of such corruption. One typical way of converting inside information into cash was investment in real estate destined for sudden appreciation upon rezoning or upon announcement of infrastructure development projects, such as the construction of new highways.³⁸⁾ The widespread nature of these practices, however, became evident in August 1993, with the new asset disclosure regulations of the current administration. It became apparent that many of the politicians and public officials had become millionaires during the period of rampant real estate speculation. Between 1975 and 1992 the market value of land appreciated at least 18 percent per year on average, and with the interest rate charged by commercial banks averaging about 12 percent per annum over the same period, funds from all parts of society gravitated to real estate speculation.³⁹⁾ This kind of exploitation of privileged access to information for personal profit had been very pervasive and had gone on for a long time. These corrupt practices also are deeply involved with the abuse of governmental authority.

Furthermore, distorted economic growth has remained as one of the most serious problems of the Korean economy. It cannot be denied that there is a great disparity between heavy industries and light industries, and between big businesses and small businesses. This widening gap is indicative of the deepening economic polarization. Under this distorted

38 Park, Byeong Seog, "Political Corruption in South Korea" in *Asian Perspective* Vol.19, No.1 Spring-Summer 1995, 180.

39 Ibid., 181.

growth, big companies are reaping enormous profits while their smaller subsidiaries and subcontractors are suffering financial problems and debt. According to the statistical report of the Korean government, during the first ten months of 1995, 11,416 small firms went under.⁴⁰⁾ In particular, small firms face a decline in sales and a financial crunch while some dealers in foreign luxury goods seem to enjoy booming business. If this industrial polarization continues, it is feared there will be an inordinate amount of bankruptcies and poverty amid affluence.

The policy of unbalanced economic growth has resulted in relative rural impoverishment and the massive migration of the rural population into urban centers. So the shortage of agricultural labor has become a serious problem, and many of these migrant people are engaged in cheap occupations. On the other hand, there are other social strata emerging with economic power: engineers, economists, and technicians who became the plutocrats and the technocrats. These groups penetrate into the upper classes by virtue of their wealth and skill. Therefore, a deepening of the socio - economic gap between the rural and the urban areas, and the sacrifice of the rights and welfare of laborers has arisen as a serious social problem, too. There are many upstarts and *nouveaux riches* who live an idle life of wealth and luxury. According to the statistical report, the top twenty percent of the population possesses 60 percent of the properties of Korea. More serious is that the top five percent of the whole population possessed more than 65 percent of the private land and 87 percent of the forest land in 1988.⁴¹⁾ In contrast to this, the lowest 75 percent possessed

40 Korea Times, December 2, 1995: 6

41 Lee, Won Gue, The Sociological Interpretation of the Korean Church (Korean)(Seoul: The Bible Institute Publishing, 1992), 96.

only 9.2 percent of all private land.⁴²⁾ These structural inequalities of ownership of property and land make for a serious conflict between social strata. Furthermore, many upper-class persons have amassed great fortunes through speculative investments in real estate, usury, leasing, and stock-jobbing. They become the leisured classes who live on unearned incomes and this living style depresses the morale of hardworking laborers and the middle - class people.

Nevertheless, not only the upper class's way of building up wealth, but also its way of spending its fortune is a serious social problem. The tendency toward excessive consumption of luxury goods and the tendency toward extravagance prevailing in Korean society of late began with the leisured classes. These tendencies of the upper-class have aroused an aversion among the majority of ordinary people. We would say, therefore, the conflict between social classes comes from this unjust distribution of wealth.

The long period of the military dictatorial regime and its poorly balanced relationship with the civil society, the abusive exercise of authority by governmental organs, the pervasive enlargement of giant family-controlled industrial-business conglomerates and their collusive connections to politics, the abnormally developed political parties and regional hegemonism, illegal financial management by the nation's financial circles, the social plague of worshiping money and material things - all these defects were fertile soil for corruption. As mentioned earlier, in the context of economic development, there arose serious social problems such as rural impoverishment, a tendency toward excessive consumption of luxury goods

42 Ibid.

and the relative sense of deprivation and there is an obvious contradiction between total human development and economic development. In Korean society, moreover, there is strong tendency toward mammon-worship and society is success oriented. Individuals are expected to strive for high salary, better social position, and more power. However, for the lower classes it seems that only the upper class may achieve these goals. Therefore, various forms of social irregularity and corruption became common practice in Korean society where the lower stratum sees no other way to acceptable social goals. There are many criminals who feel unable to achieve a share of the good life through work. This is why they try to get it by breaking the law. Accordingly, the demand of the leisured classes has led to plenty of large-scale leisure and entertainment businesses which let society fall into lavish habits. The miraculous economic growth has failed to include human liberation as its goal and the qualitative, equal enhancement of the life of the whole Korean people.

The Church in Recent Korean Social History

For the last few decades, the Korean church has grown enormously and this is unparalleled in world church history. However, this growth in quantity does not match Korea's socio-economic and political situation well. One fourth of the population is "Christian", but the people as a whole has experienced strong dehumanization and socio-economic injustices. Many Koreans have anchored their hope on religion when they experienced social injustices. However, the Korean churches are powerless when they come to

many problems in their society. What is the reason that one of the major religions, the Korean Christianity, seems to be enervated when the society expects them to improve the conditions of strong dehumanization and socio-economic injustice. There are some particular obstacles that explain why the Korean churches have been slow to respond to the Korean people's expectation and have failed God's demand for social justice.

One of the reasons for this failure is found in the notion that religion is a private matter between an individual and God. The role of church in society has been understood as a spiritual "Noah's Ark,"⁴³⁾ saving people from the evil world. Christian salvation has been understood to be an individual's withdrawal from "a wicked and perverse generation".⁴⁴⁾ This tendency has led the Korean church to privatize biblical teaching and to avoid facing situations of socio-economic reality. The Korean church has preached the doctrine of redemption as a financial metaphor, saying we are redeemed from the seriousness of our sins through Christ's perfect obedience unto death. However, as long as the meaning of redemption is simply a matter of private and personal redemption, the message of the Bible has little meaning in our concrete socio-economic and political realities. Although this type of belief has limited interest in social justice issues, nevertheless it has contributed to an increase in the number of churchgoers who want to look for spiritual security. This is one of the reasons that the Korean church has grown enormously.

There is a common tendency toward shamanistic belief to seek blessings in material wealth, good health, and other forms of personal and

43 Gen. 6:14

44 Mt. 16:14; 17:17

financial well-being. In the process of industrialization and urbanization, Koreans have attempted to achieve a better life by any means possible, one of which was to attend church where some pastor has stressed, and offered them, a better earthly life. This has appealed not only to many migrant people but also to the middle class who suffer from a firm sense of relative deprivation compared to those of higher status.

In the Korean church, there is a link between wealth and faith. It seems to be understood that good wealth and health prove an individual's good faith, and lack of property reflects some lack of faith. In this view, the church is not a refuge from materialism but another institutional embodiment of it. Churches in Korea tend to be more interested in accommodating the upper class than the *minjung*. They promote the idea that "the bigger the church the better."⁴⁵⁾ Moreover, many Korean pastors are more interested in fame and material success. So the tendency of shamanistic faith seeking individual blessings in material wealth has made the Korean church blind to the social dimension of Christian faith.

The next obstacle to the church responding for social justice is the continuous schisms within the Korean churches themselves. There were 261 Protestant denominations in Korea as of 1981⁴⁶⁾ and at present in Korea, one church is established every four hours--six churches every day.⁴⁷⁾ However, there is very little theological basis for the continuous schisms within both individual congregations and denominational organizations. This

45 Kang, Yosep, "The Gospel and Minjung Theology" in Korean Theological Thought (Seoul: Christian Literature, 1983), 385.

46 Han, Gil Soo, Social Sources of Church Growth: Korean Churches in the Homeland and Overseas (Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), 9.

47 Ibid., 68.

has had to do with "trivial matters such as factionalism, regionalism, and power struggles between the leaders."⁴⁸⁾ One of the main causes of schism within individual congregations may be the conflict between a minister and some of the elders. This can sometimes result in a split within a congregation, leading to the formation of a new congregation in competition with those remaining in the previous congregation. The schisms in the Korean churches were one of the most pervasive phenomena and they raised criticism about the Korean churches' internal troubles. Therefore, the Korean churches have been known to non-Christians as a group of selfish organizations maintaining their "nobility" by being on the side of the "haves" and those with power while neglecting the "have-nots" and the oppressed. Instead of taking the role of the light and salt of the society of which the Korean churches are a part, they have seriously suffered from the disruption caused by factionalism.

Futhermore, the rapid process of industrialization and urbanization has led most Korean churches to take expansion in membership as their major goal. Because of this tendency, budget and church building by means of highly technological systems directly connected the way of ministry to achieving the major goal. Many Korean pastors over-stress "God's material blessing in the present life" in their sermons⁴⁹⁾ and they need a tight bureaucratic control to achieve their major goal. When a minister establishes a church with a few members, one of his first actions is to rent

48 Yi, Sang Gyu, "The Schism of the Korean Church and It's Historical Factors" in Research Journal of Church Affairs, Vol. 5: What are the Problems with Korean churches today?, September 1986, 103.

49 Clark, Donald N., Christianity in Modern Korea (NewYork: University Press of America, 1986), 25.

a meeting place. Then the top priority is to have the congregation's own building. After they have their own church building, the next priority is to construct a new extension building for education, next the church's own retreat center, next the church cemetery, and even apartments for church members. A good number of Korean ministers are most interested in recruiting new members for material success because they are supported financially by church members. Commonly, the Korean churches have special rallies for spiritual revival a few times every year. These are regarded as opportunities to raise money.

Korean churches have been experiencing the "bigness syndrome".⁵⁰ The number of congregations and the size of the annual budget have been used as measures of a successful ministry. Kim Byong Suh points out the problems of materialism which have deeply penetrated churches in Korea, noting that, "personality structure and lifestyles developed by human interaction based on the money economy and calculability of 'cold cash' have spread among the people in the church."⁵¹ The church as a religious institution is supposed to be a positive force for social change in the midst of injustices, however the extreme materialism and economic entrepreneurialism have deeply penetrated Korean churches. As a result, the Korean churches have become another institutional embodiment of materialism, and thus lost their credibility.

In viewing the destructive factors arising from rapid church growth in connection to the role of religion for social change, there are many obstacles to social change in Korea: the over-emphasis on personal salvation

50 Kim, Byong Suh, "The Explosive Growth of the Korean Church Today: A Sociological Analysis", *International Review of Mission* 74(293), 71.

51 *ibid.*, 72.

and the privatization of the Biblical message; the shamanistic seeking after blessing in material wealth and health; the constant schisms within individual congregations and denominations; the predominant materialistic thinking and church policy. It is true that salvation, wealth, and health represent the very essence of Christianity to many Korean Christians and this is an extremely popular view.

To add to these destructive factors, I want to argue for one more unavoidable dark side of the Korean church. That is the major conservative churches' pro-government tendency and illicit connections with military governments. Theological and political conservatism characterize the ideology of these churches, and they invariably lack any social concern. Their principle of the separation of politics from religion came from the literal interpretation of Bible verses that "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's,"⁵²⁾ and "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God . . . Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed . . ." ⁵³⁾ This theological and political conservatism also was reinforced by the Korean War, which was a tragic confrontation between two major world power blocks. Many North Korean refugee congregations had bitter experiences of persecution by the communists and from North Korea during the Korean War. They facilitated the Korean church's collaborating with the national security state government. Moreover, the national security state argued that the Korean church should agree to collaborate with the national anti-communism ideology as a nationalistic stance against the

52 Mk. 12:17

53 Rom. 13:1-2, cf also 1 Peter 2:13-17.

common enemy. Thus the majority of the churches in South Korea have contributed in many ways to such a national security ideology. As a consideration of being in partnership with the national security system, the military government supported this kind of churches in many ways. As a result of this, those Korean churches became a silent community in the area of human rights, which has been victimized by the national security state ideology. This coalition blinded Korean Christians to the socio-economic and political realities of the *minjung*.

Until now, we have discussed some defects in many Korean churches in connection with the religious function for social change, and found that the negative side of church growth in Korea over recent decades has been due to the complex interaction of a number of factors. However, the explosive growth in quantity is meaningless unless it is linked with the qualitative growth. In order to get a firm foundation for the role of the Korean church in its social involvement, the Korean church desperately needs to change its attitude to society. It must change from the function of maintaining the existing social order to being a creative force for social change. The Korean church must be criticized if it legitimizes the existing power and privileges of the ruling elite, if it discriminates against the *minjung* by persuading them to accept the existing social order.

While the conservative majority of Korean churches has been an instrument of domination in defending the established social *status quo* and has sided with the dominant group and its economic and political systems, a minority in the 1970s of Korean churches adopted a critical position toward the military dictatorship. This conscientious minority rejected the government's view of development as anti-*minjung* or dehumanizing. They

realized that this type of development destroys the *minjung*'s rights in Korea. They were concerned about the *minjung* who are being exploited and pointed out the growing marginalization of the *minjung* as a result of economic growth. They became deeply involved in the struggle of the *minjung* for justice. In the early 1970s, as their involvement intensified, the government dismissed them from their teaching jobs in universities and seminaries. This gave them the opportunity to participate more actively in the *minjung* movement with the university student movements, the organizations of writers and poets, journalists, professors and politicians. From this time, the theme of *minjung* became a concern of Korean theology and some theologians began to learn and reflect upon the experiences of *minjung*. Furthermore, they engaged in mission work "to protect the human rights of the workers, the farmers, and the urban poor, and to fight for the justice and freedom of writers and university teachers."

⁵⁴⁾ The Kwangju revolt, in particular, can be understood as one of the recent instances of the *minjung* movement for justice. The dissenting church leaders opposed the rise of Chun Doo Hwan, spoke out against human rights abuses and wrote a letter to Chun protesting the use of torture in prison. Especially, in June of 1982, seven leading pastors issued "a Statement on Social Injustice condemning inequities in the economic system, denouncing the way the Chun regime took power, and quoting Amos 5:24 : Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"⁵⁵⁾ In contrast to the apolitical majority of Korean

54 Suh, Kwang Sun David., "Korean Theological Development in the 1970s" in Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History (Singapore: The Commission of Theological Concerns of Christian Conference of Asia, 1981), 40.

55 Clark, Donald N., Christianity in Modern Korea (New York: The Asia Society, 1986), 43.

churches's explosive expansion even under these circumstances, the minority of dissident Christians committed themselves to the *minjung* movement and continued their campaign for human rights and social justice while making efforts on behalf of workers, farmers, and the urban poor under the military regime that took over after the Kwangju revolt. The *minjung* movement for democratization under the dissenting church's leadership was rekindled after it was revealed that a student, Park Chong Chol, had been tortured to death in 1987. Then, the power of *minjung* led to the June 10 resistance upheaval of 1987 and forced the military rulers to accept the demand for popular election of the president. On June 29, 1987, Roh Tae-Woo, as a presidential candidate, publically accepted the principal demands, including those for direct presidential elections, release of political prisoners, freedom of the press, protection of human rights and university autonomy.⁵⁶⁾ The *minjung* movement successfully challenged the authoritarian system in June, 1987. In this regard, unlike the Latin American case, long military rule came to an end not because of an internal split among the military rulers, but because of *minjung* pressure from below, pushed and promoted by anti-government forces based in the *minjung* movement. In this sense, *Minjung* theology may be considered as a creative and revolutionary factor for social change in the ongoing movements of the Korean *minjung*.

Up to now, we have observed the origin of *Minjung* theology in the midst of the *minjung* movement for the last few decades under the military regimes. We may conclude that in the context of solidarity with the *minjung*, *Minjung* theology gives a clear denunciation of oppressive and

56 Macdonald, Donald S., "South Korea's Politics Since Liberation" in Korea Briefing 1993 (Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 27.

dehumanizing realities such as political oppression, economic exploitation, social and cultural discrimination and also challenges every legitimization of oppressive social structures.

Chapter II

Social History of Israel and Social Location of Amos

The Two Socio-Economic Systems behind Israel's Origins

The typical socio-economic order of pre-monarchic Israel during the period of the tribal confederation--displaced by the monarchic system--was an egalitarian mode of agricultural and pastoral life on small land holdings of equal size apportioned by the clans. Their living together was determined by the order of the families, clans, and tribes. This body of people who were agriculturalists and pastoralists organized in economically self-sufficient extended families with egalitarian access to basic resources.⁵⁷⁾ Their economy was a form of intensive rain agriculture with animal husbandry, which systematized its production, distribution, and consumption along essentially egalitarian lines.⁵⁸⁾ The following list of broad formal features or traits of tribal organization are from Norman K. Gottwald's work on the tribal mode of early Israel:

1. The tribe represents a sharp increase in demographic size over the hunting and gathering or primitive agricultural band, normally a leap from fewer than one hundred people to several hundreds or thousands.
2. The population increase is closely connected with a more secure control over an enlarged food surplus.

57 Gottwald, Norman K., "Domain Assumptions and Societal Models in the Study of Pre-Monarchic Israel", in The Hebrew Bible in Its social world and in Ours (Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993), 9.

58 Ibid., 10.

3. The enlarged food surplus is secured not only by technological improvements but by more intricate social bonding by means of many cross-cutting associations or sodalities which interconnect the residential units, notable among these associations being the exogamous clan.

4. The sub-divisions of the tribe are typically segmented, i.e., they are structurally and functionally equivalent and politically equal, so that in principle any one of them could be destroyed and the tribe would survive.

5. The tribe carries out its political functions by diffused or temporary role assignments in such a way that there is no political leadership network distinguishable from the network of social leadership, although the rudiments of specialized political leadership appear with the tribal chiefdom.⁵⁹⁾

According to Jorge Pixley's term, furthermore, pre-monarchic Israel was regulated by "the people's law"⁶⁰⁾ which was attributed to Yahweh. Pixley calls these laws people's law because, lacking any State authorities, they were administered by the elders of the people. Yahweh was the king of tribal Israel⁶¹⁾ and this meant that the free peasants of Israel paid tribute to nobody.⁶²⁾ The tribal Israel had no specialized political offices rooted in a superordinate sovereignty. Gottwald reads Israelite tribalism as a form chosen by people who consciously rejected Canaanites centralization of power and a rupture from the totalitarian, hierarchical social order in the hinterland of Canaan.⁶³⁾

59 Ibid.

60 Pixley, Jorge, Biblical Israel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 23.

61 Jud.8:22-23; 1Sam.8:7; Num.23:22; Deut.33:4-5.

62 Ibid., 23-24.

63 Gottwald, op. cit., 12-14.

The distinctive social order of ancient tribal Israel which seems to be a egalitarian stateless community came to a slow and steady end by a development which was strongly supported by the establishment of a state and which completely contradicted the many features of Israelite tribalism. The further development shifted the economic point of gravity more and more from the countryside to the bigger cities. With the increasing predominance of the cities and the formation of a highly stratified society, a small ruling elite could take charge permanently in the agricultural production. The free peasants lost their land holdings in a dependent position and may run into debt and become tenant farmers, laborers, and debt slaves dependent on an urban landlord or merchant. A peasant in ancient Israel was not an agricultural entrepreneur but rather maintained a household. Instead of earning a profit he wanted to feed his family which was the basic economic unit. However, as a way the shifting of socio-economic system from the predominance of patrimonial domain⁶⁴⁾ used in the premonarchic period to prebendal domain⁶⁵⁾ which was used during the monarchic period, ca. 1000 - 600 B.C.E., the role of the small ruling elite was encouraging, manipulating, and profiting from this shift.⁶⁶⁾ If the climatically conditioned crop failures - for example, caused by locusts or several successive droughts - occurred more frequently, then the peasants

64 Coote, Robert B., Amos among the Prophets (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 27. According to Coote, "Patrimonial domain is exercised by persons who inherit ownership usually passed from father to son." The primary understanding of domain in Israel is patrimonial domain and this kind of domain in Israel can be described as redistributational clan egalitarianism.

65 Ibid., "Prebendal domain is exercised by officials of a state by virtue of grants from a sovereign who holds ultimate ownership of the land." The officials control the income from the land and these grants of income are known as prebends.

66 Ibid., 26.

had to borrow money, often at excessively high interest rates. The society was split up beyond hope into poor and rich, "have-nots" and "haves." Especially, from the era of David and Solomon forwards there was a progressive "Canaanization" of the economic and religious system which created the situation attacked by the prophet Amos.

In the passage of Genesis 47:13-26, the story tells us how a free peasant becomes more and more dependent on a creditor. It is written that in a time of great famine, the Egyptians had to convey everything to the Pharaoh - first, all the money that was payment for the grain, then their herds of cattle, then their land and even themselves, so that they were in bondage, owing to the Pharaoh one fifth of their annual harvest (Gen 47:24). It is known that this story does not fit in with Egyptian economic system; rather it reflects how the poor Israelite peasant becomes dependent on a rich landlord.⁶⁷⁾

The result was a separation between actual ownership of land and labor. Peasants overburdened with debts had to sell themselves into bondage to work off their liabilities. The bondsmen became serfs liable to tax or they were even sold and thus became real and permanent slaves.⁶⁸⁾ The poor peasants could not pay for the grain bought for consumption or sowing, but more and more became indebted with and interest payments and ended up as their creditors' permanent debtors and bondsmen which is so characteristic of "rent capitalism."⁶⁹⁾ While the serf is working, the creditor or landlord draws a "rent" without working for it, they could enjoy

67 Lang, Bernhard, "The social Organization of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel", JSOT 24 (1982), 50.

68 This can be demonstrated on the basis of Amos 2:6; 8:6; Exod.21:2-11.

69 Ibid., 29.

the pleasant life of the leisure class.⁷⁰⁾

The self-sufficiency of the agricultural village was broken increasingly to a dependence upon the centralizing forces and the economy dominated by the central state. In such a system of rent capitalism, not only are ownership of the land the labor separated, but each of the factors of agricultural production is segmented from the others and subjected to separate rent.⁷¹⁾ "While rural residence of the wealthy favors a multi-stranded patron-client relationship with poor cultivators, a single-stranded relationship of economic exploitation is most often the result when the elite are urban-based."⁷²⁾

Soon after King David established the first absolute monarchy, Israel, a stateless peasant society which had created egalitarian community of the Tribal Confederacy was destroyed. David was the first tyrant in the history of Israel, he imported and created a bureaucratic system from Egypt to control his kingdom. He took the Jebusite city of Jerusalem and made it his city, "the city of David" (II Sam 5:6-12). Solomon came to the throne as his father's heir. He inherited from king David a more institutionalized monarchy. He could consolidate a dynastic monarchy and also could develop a stronger aristocratic and bureaucratic kingdom. From a tribal confederation Israelite society changed to the unified territorial state which was directly dependent on the will and the financial support of the king. Under the monarchy, the king and the few bureaucrats who served at the

70 Proverbs 22:7

71 Coote, op. cit., 29-32.

72 Chaney, Marvin L., "Bitter Bounty - The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eight-Century prophets -" Gottwald, Norman K. ed., The Bible and liberation Political and Social Hermeneutics (NewYork: Orbis Books, 1993), 258.

royal pleasure held the socio-political decision-making power and could impose their decisions on the majority, even by force. The professional army, including foreign mercenaries, was set up not only to protect the state in times of crisis, but also to impose the king's and bureaucrat's decisions and wills. As a result of it, the socio-political structure of Israel became pyramidal and the equal federation of tribes based on Yahwism could not be continued. The state opened the way to social and economic stratification, and economic inequality was increased. According to the perspective of the poor peasant, living under aristocratic kingdoms means nothing but the imposing of a burden. Jorge Pixley describes the oppressive administration of the reign of Solomon:

Each of the governors was responsible for raising the tribute necessary to sustain the state apparatus during one month out of the year, with food for the numerous families of the King, for the "servant of the king" and for the war horses (I King 5:1-8).⁷³⁾

With the rise of the monarchy in the Israel's history, there were not only socio-political changes, but also religious changes. The huge Yahweh Temple located in the state capital, Jerusalem, and on royal property, functioned as a royal institution under the control and protection of the King. The royal priests became state bureaucrats, and developed a royal theology based on God's special relationship with their king. Particularly, Solomon's enhancement of his capital city, including the famous Temple, represented a concrete visual statement of the shape and strength of the new socio-political, economic, and religious order.

Only the ruling elite enjoyed the extravagant lifestyle of power and

73 Pixley, Jorge, Biblical Israel (Minneapolis; Fortress Press, 1992), 41.

prosperity. However, the largest portion of the population, especially the poor peasants, suffered from the increased burden of taxes and forced labor. This harder life probably made them look back upon the past life of the tribal confederation.

The Socio-Economic and Political Conditions of Israel in the eight-century.

In the first half of the eighth century B.C.E., owing to Syria's decline of power and Assyria's turmoil at home, Judah and Israel prospered. During the period of Assyrian weakness both Israel and Judah had strong Kings who enjoyed long reigns.

Unhampered by Assyria, Jeroboam II, who was the greatest King of the Jehu dynasty, was able to expand the borders of Israel. The Northern Kingdom of Jeroboam II was a prosperous nation. The Deuteronomistic historian tells us very little about Jeroboam II or about the nature of his rule. We can find a brief note that he "restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah" (II King 14:25). Jeroboam II may have regained control over Transjordan and parts of Syria, including Damascus. Never before had an Israelite monarch held such a large territory. Alluding to Jeroboam's military victories, Amos mentions two cities in the Transjordan captured by Israel (Amos 6:13). These two Transjordanian cities, Lo-debar and Karnaim,⁷⁴ controlled major routes east

74 It may be that Amos was making a deliberate wordplay on the names of these cities : Lo-debar suggests "nothing", and Karnaim "horns", a metaphor for Strength, see King,

of the Jordan River.

Through the newly - acquired land, Jeroboam was able to control the trade routes from Syria and the commercial highway from Arabia. Moreover, lucrative commercial trade, free interchange of goods, and colonial activity--such as receiving tribute from the conquered peoples and charging tolls from caravans--poured a great deal of wealth into Israel and made her a more prosperous nation than ever before.⁷⁵⁾

However, it was not wealth which was equally shared among all people in the nation. It also occasioned social injustice and rank exploitation at home, as Amos continuously pointed out. The economic polarization produced a very wealthy class of ruling elites and merchants who "feel secure on the mountain of Samaria" (6:1) but who "oppress the poor" and "crush the needy" (4:1) even as they enjoy their own luxuries. John Bright describes well the excessive social injustice and its mortal illness,

Israelite society, as Amos lets us see it, was marked by egregious injustice and a shocking contrast between extremes of wealth and poverty. The small farmer, whose economic status was marginal at best, found himself often at the mercy of the moneylender, and at the slightest calamity - a drought, a crop failure (cf. Amos 4:6-9) - liable to foreclosure and eviction, if not bond service. The system, which was itself harsh, was made harsher by the greed of the wealthy, who took unmerciful advantage of the plight of the poor in order to enlarge their holdings, often resorting to the sharpest practices, the

Philip J., Amos, Hosea, Micha-An Archaeological Commentary (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 31.

75 Anderson, Bernhard N., Understanding The Old Testament (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 288.

falsification of weights and measures, and various legal dodges to achieve their ends (Amos 2:6f. ; 5:11 ; 8:4-6). But dishonest practices obtained everywhere since the judges were venal (Amos 5:10-12), the poor had no redress. In increasing numbers they were robbed and dispossessed.⁷⁶⁾

Under these disintegrated social and economic circumstances, religion went into decay too. The great shrines of Israel, Bethel and Gilgal, were often thronged with worshipers and lavishly supported (4:4f; 5:4-5; 21-24), but it was worship supported by a inadequate view of God. The present prosperity, victory, and prestige among the nations were viewed as Yahweh's special blessing to the ruling elite (5:14b). They were flushed with the national revival and economic boom, and so anticipated the great Day of Yahweh, with the confidence of divine blessing.⁷⁷⁾ Amos's notion of the Day of Yahweh, however, was exactly the opposite attitude to that which the people desired in their conviction that it would be a time of the final climax of divine blessing and fulfillment of the covenant. Amos reversed the popular belief of his time. In his eyes, the present prosperity was the major reason for the coming doom of Yahweh rather than the foretaste of the great Day of Yahweh. Amos recognized the deteriorated social and economic situation of his times and matched it against the will of God which was in ancient times the basis of the social order in Israel.

76. Bright, John A History of Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981 3rd edition), 260.

77. Anderson, *op. cit.*, 294-295.

The Social Location of Amos

We have been given very little biographical information about Amos. Amos 1:1 tells us that he was a shepherd from the region of the Judean village of Tekoa, a small village six miles southeast of Bethlehem and ten miles of Jerusalem. The verse identifies the Southern King Uzziah (ca. 783-742) and the Northern King Jeroboam II (ca. 786-746), son of Joash, as the rulers during whose reigns the work of Amos took place. Old Testament scholars date the time of Amos's prophetic activity at about 760 B.C.E.⁷⁸⁾ He was a southerner (1:1), yet his work was done in the Northern Kingdom Israel (7:10). Amos 7:14 adds the information that Amos was a herdsman. In Amos 7:14, the prophet refers to himself as a herdsman and the Hebrew word for herdsman, *boqer* means "one who herds cattle", indicating that Amos may have grazed large cattle as well as small sheep.⁷⁹⁾ Max E. Polley compares the Hebrew word for shepherd (*noqed*) and the Ugaritic term *nqdm* and guesses that Amos had a higher social standing, like a royal sheep manager, than an ordinary shepherd and he would have had contact with cultic language similar to that found in his sayings.⁸⁰⁾ Amos 7:14 also tells us that he was a "dresser of sycamore trees". We don't know exactly whether Amos may have been the owner of an agricultural enterprise like a grove of sycamore trees or he may have been hired to care for the fruit of another person's sycamore trees. It remains doubtful that he was a wealthy man and his true economic status

78 Newsome, James D., The Hebrew Prophets (Georgia: John Knox Press, 1984), 17.

79 Polley, Max E., Amos and the Davidic Empire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10.

80 Ibid.

is hard to determine.

At the confrontation with the northern chief priest Amaziah at Bethel (7:10-17), however, Amos denied that he was a *nabi*. Amaziah told Amos to go to Judah and prophesy there (v.12b), but never to prophesy again at Bethel (v.13a). Amaziah referred to Amos as a seer (*hozeh*) and probably thought that Amos was a member of a professional guild of seers. In this biographical report (7:10-17), the prophet Amos offers his prophetic credentials. Especially, Amos 7:14-15 cautious words hotly contested among modern interpreters. The debate has endured over whether *lo nabi anoki* and the two subsequent nominal clauses should be translated in the present or the past tense. JB, NAB, NIV and NKJV translate the tense in the past tense which means "I was no prophet and neither was I the son of a prophet." The implication would be that he was not a member of a prophetic guild in the past but on the basis of his call to prophetic activity he became a prophet. God called him from following the flock and said to him "Go, prophesy to my people Israel (7:15)." However, the present tense translation is used by RSV, NRSV, NEB and NASB. Then it may be understood, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son." The expression "son of a prophet" means a member of a prophetic guild. According to this view, Amos is setting himself apart from contemporary "*nabis*" and is refusing a social location within the established religions and political institutions.

There are groups of non-*minjung* in the history of Korea. One group is the oppressors and the exploiters of the *minjung*. This group of people can be called "anti-*minjung*". There was another group of non-*minjung*, however. They not do not act with hostility to ward the *minjung*, but they do nothing for the liberation of the *minjung*. We can

name this group of people as "neutral non-*minjung*". The last non-*minjung* group is those who participate voluntarily in the suffering of *minjung*, this non-*minjung* group shows strong solidarity with the *minjung*. We do not whether know Amos came from the *minjung* or not, but we know that he always stood on the side of the *minjung* as their advocate. Therefore, we may say that Amos was a prophet on behalf of the *minjung*, even if we cannot be sure whether he was an actual representative of the *minjung* although this is possible.

The Socio-Economic Conditions are Reflected in the Book of Amos

The prophet Amos accused the upper classes of exploitation and oppression of the peasants. According to Amos's accusation, the rich have separate houses for winter and summer (3:15), and have built houses of hewn stone (5:11). Their furniture is decorated with beautiful carved work of expensive ivory which was imported from Phoenicia (3:15; 6:4). The rich did not produce anything but spent most of their time feasting, with big bowls of wine (2:8; 4:1; 6:6), fatted lambs and calves (5:22; 6:4), finest oils (6:6), and music and singing (5:23; 6:5). In other words, they were the "haves", the well-to-do, the well-housed, the well-fed, the strong, the holders of all kinds of power and privilege. They were the oppressors and exploiters of the poor peasants.

In contrast to this luxurious and extravagant life of a small upper class, we can find the extremely miserable life of poor peasants who belong

to the *minjung* group. In Amos's oracle against Israel (2:6-16), Amos names four instances of suppression of the powerless and the poor those who were *minjung* in the book of Amos : The righteous (*saddiq*) and the needy (*'ebyon*) are sold as a slave for silver or even such a little thing as a pair of sandals (2:6b) and the poor (*anawim*) and afflicted (*dalim*) are not given a fair right as a human (2:7a); the woman (*hanna'ra*) is dominated and not respected, when both a man and his father patronize the same maiden (2:7b); the garments which are taken in pledge are not returned, in contradiction to Israel's ancient legal tradition (the Covenant code; Exod. 22:26f), the wine paid in fines (Exod. 21:22; Deut. 22:10) is being used for partying and they drink wine in the house of their god (2:8b).

The poor and needy had been crushed by the haves of Samaria (4:1); the righteous had been oppressed because of a bribe and the poor had been pushed out from the court in the gate (5:12); the poor and the needy had been trampled (5:11 ; 8:4); the poor of the land had been trampled (2:7; 8:4); the afflicted had been oppressed, trampled, and pushed out of the way (2:7b; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6).

Amos refers to payments of crop (5:11). According to the New English Bible, the passage say: "Because you levy taxes on the poor and extort a tribute of grain from them . . . ", but a more accurate translation may be, "Because you make tenants out of the weak, and take tribute of corn from him."⁸¹ The same passage explains what the landlords do with the extorted riches. They build beautiful "houses of hewn stone" and plant "pleasant vineyards." The poor peasants overburdened with debts and are being "bought" because of their bondage or obligation (8:6). The upper

81 Mays, J.L., *Amos* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 90.

class used the poor and needy as a source of income and they became a depersonalized object to be exploited.

At 8:4-6, Amos is secretly listening a speech which reveals the corn dealers' brutality and fraud: "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances . . .".⁸²⁾

The Israel *minjung* in the book of Amos are poor peasants who had been suppressed by the cruel landlord. They are miserable serfs who had been robbed of their property by the ruthless creditor. They tell no words and remain silent even though they are in the dreadful condition of being oppressed. However, we can clearly hear the peasant *minjung*'s cries for justice and righteousness of Yahweh through the accusation of prophet Amos. In the suffering of this peasant *minjung*, we can see strong divine demand of justice. According to Amos's message to the people who are "at ease" and "feel secure" (6:1), Yahweh will pour her/his wrath on this people because of their oppression to the poor peasants.

82 Proverbs 11:26 alludes to the practice of hoarding grain in seasons of scarcity in order to sell it at high price: "The people curse those who hold back grain, but a blessing is on the head of those who sell it."

Chapter III

Message of Amos and his notion of Justice

The God of the Hebrew Bible is recognized as the God of Hebrews (Ex.3:18) because she/he is immanent in the suffering of Hebrews. The God of Exodus is regarded as the only true liberator and protector of the weak and the poor. God introduces her/himself as the God of the widow and orphan.⁸³⁾ Oppression of widow and orphan is denounced in the Covenant Code (Ex. 22:21-24). An apodictic command from God is given not to abuse the legal rights of the poor (Ex. 23:6). Anyone who abuses the rights of the stranger (*ger*), widow, and orphan is cursed (Deut. 27:19). Yahweh gives justice to the *minjung* in the Old Testament and everybody has to do likewise. This distinct kind of social responsibility is in the Book of the Covenant (Ex.20:22-23:33). We can easily recognize that there is a great portion of the laws concerning the people of miserable situation, those who belong to the *minjung*. Yahweh is the God whose ears and heart are open to the cries of the Hebrew *minjung* and who is allied with the Hebrew *minjung*. The prophet Amos refers to the exodus as a paradigmatic event that revealed Yahweh's will for the people of Israel in the eighth century. Amos interprets the exodus as a *minjung* liberating event in support of his demand for social justice.

The Hebrew term "*mishpat*" is translated into English in a variety of ways, such as "justice", "rights", "vindication", "deliverance", "custom", "norm". The term "justice" is elusive and there is no single way of defining justice that satisfies all. Jose Porfirio Miranda points out the

83 Ps. 68:5; 82:3-4

explicit definition of what it is to know Yahweh. He said "to know Yahweh is to achieve justice for the poor."⁸⁴ To know Yahweh cannot be separated from obeying God's commands. Yahweh is known only in submitting oneself to God's commands.

In the book of Amos, the terms *mishpat* and *sedaqah* appear three times as a pair.

"Ah, you that turn *justice* to wormwood, and bring *righteousness* to the ground." (Amos 5:7)

"But let *justice* roll down like waters, and *righteousness* like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24)

"Does one plow the sea with oxen?

Do horses run on rocks?

But you have turned *justice* into poison and the fruit of *righteousness* into wormwood." (6:12)

In addition, *mishpat* appears once more by itself:

Hate evil and love good, and establish *justice* in the gate. (5:15)

For Amos, the two Hebrew terms *mishpat* (justice) and *sedaqah* (righteousness) are used synonymously,⁸⁵ but the term *mishpat* is central. The word *mishpat* means the judgment given by the *shofet* (judge) which is a noun derived from *shafat* (to judge).⁸⁶ Yahweh was regarded as the *shofet* (judge) and the guardian of justice because justice and righteousness are her/his holy nature and attributes.⁸⁷ Yahweh was summoned to judge the nations for their disregard of justice in their social dealings with other people.⁸⁸

84 Miranda, Jose Porfirio, Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1974), 44.

85 Amos 5:24; cf., Gen 18:19

86 Miranda, Jose Porfirio, op. cit., 111.

87 Ps. 97:2

In the wide variety of our term for justice, *mishpat*, we may say that laws are just because they create harmony within the society. Yahweh is just⁸⁹⁾ not only as lawgiver and Lord of the covenant; his saving deeds are called "just deeds" because they restore the society when it has been threatened.⁹⁰⁾ Justice is a divine concern for the marginal people in society: the widow, the poor, the alien. This concern for the defenseless and powerless in society is not a command designed simply to promote social harmony, but is rooted in the nature of Yahweh her/himself who is defender of the oppressed.⁹¹⁾ The justice of Yahweh is Yahweh's fidelity to her/his promises and also saving help. Yahweh rewards according to justice⁹²⁾ and vindication comes from the justice of God.⁹³⁾ Yahweh reveals himself as a God who is compassionate to the oppressed and is their vindicator. When Israel is the oppressed one, he leads them out of slavery; when they inherit the land, he again emerges as the protector of the landless. We can say that the term justice is used interchangeably with the name of God, Yahweh is a God who breaks into institutionalized injustice of humankind to liberate the *minjung*.⁹⁴⁾ The justice of Yahweh requires, therefore, the kind of liberating activity that characterizes God's deeds toward the *minjung*.

When Israel forgets the covenant, it is the prophet Amos who proclaims to Israel that their loyalty to the covenant Yahweh must be

88 Ps. 9:7-9

89 2Chr.12:6; Neh.9:8; Ps.7:9; 103:17; 116:5; Jer.9:24; 23:5; Dan.9:14; Zeph.3:5; Zech.8:8.

90 Miranda, op. cit., 156.

91 Miranda, ibid., 77-106

92 Ps.18:20

93 Ps.35:24

94 Miranda, op. cit., 127.

apparent in concern for the poor and the oppressed. Amos speaks not with foresight into the far future but with insight into the ways in which people have broken the covenant. Amos is one of the strongest to call Israel to return to justice. What were the transgressions of the northern kingdom of Israel? Yahweh will not revoke the punishment because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, because they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth (Am.2:6b,7). They will be punished because they trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain (Am.5:11). Who were they? They were not the righteous, the needy and the poor, but they were the rich and exploiters of Amos' day. Amos culminates his judgment against this kind of people by proclaiming that their injustice negates their worship of Yahweh:

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offering, I will not accept them. . .

But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Am.5:21,24)

This is striking imagery for comparing justice and righteousness and the function of the festivals and solemn assemblies. One function of the cult was to pray for the water and flowing streams which could bring fertility to the land. However, the prophet Amos requires justice and righteousness in the name of Yahweh instead of water and a stream because without justice, the fertility of the rich and exploiters is barren. The totality of life comes with non-exploitation of the *minjung*. The *minjung* groups in society--the poor, the widows, the orphans, the aliens--become the scale on which the justice of the whole society is weighed. When they are exploited or oppressed, neither worship of God nor many offerings for God can result

in true Yahwism.

Abraham J. Heschel asked, "why should religion, the essence of which is worship of God, put such stress on justice for man? . . . Did not the prophets overrate the worth of justice?"⁹⁵⁾ Heschel's answer is that justice is not just a value but it is God's stake in human history. He said "perhaps it is because the suffering of man is a blot upon God's conscience; because it is in relations between man and man that God is at stake."⁹⁶⁾ Therefore, we can say that exploiting the poor affronts Yahweh and the oppression of the powerless is a humiliation of Yahweh.⁹⁷⁾ For this reason, "justice was not equal justice but a bias in favor of the poor. Justice always leaned toward mercy for the widows and the orphans".⁹⁸⁾

In the book of Amos, justice does not refer solely to a moral norm, but it also refers to basic human rights. Amos is very much concerned with social relationships among the Israelites because God's justice can be shown in her/his retribution to all people according to their social relations with other people. In the book of Amos, the peasants are most often called the poor and needy. "They are called the indigent and oppressed, those who have been mulcted and who have suffered extortion".⁹⁹⁾ According to Coote, Amos does not use the word "peasant", when he describes the ruling class's oppression of the peasantry because it is too neutral. One shocking point in the way Amos refers to the peasantry is the first word used, the

95 Heschel, Abraham J., The Prophets (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 198.

96 Ibid., 198

97 "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him" (Prov.14:31; cf.17:5).

98 Niebuhr, Reinhold, Pious and Secular America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 92.

99 Coote, Robert B., op. cit., 34-35.

"righteous" (*saddiq*).¹⁰⁰ In comparison with the ruling elite's self-deception that they are righteous and the poor's poverty reflects some lack of righteousness, it is "an offense to those whose socioeconomic status practically forces them to believe that poverty is the proof of wrong."¹⁰¹ When Amos refers to the *minjung* as the righteous, he is referring to their being in the right with respect to their dispute with oppressors over the infringement of their basic rights.

Amos's announcement to the ruling class is: "God will answer your war against the peasantry with war against you, and turn your festivity into lamentation."¹⁰² This announcement seems a condemnation, not a critique. The God of justice places her/his liberation of the *minjung* before his choice of the non-*minjung*. The condemnation of the oppressors and exploiters of the *minjung* is discriminating and exclusive because Yahweh, who "acts in the world chooses justice ahead of life."¹⁰³ Amos does not say that God urges us to help the poor, or that God will approve our helping the poor by and bye, or that God favors the poor over the rich. What he says is this: "those who take life from the powerless will lose their own lives."¹⁰⁴ This is the reason why Amos's announcement is not a program for reform, but a death sentence to the anti-*minjung*.

100 Ibid., 35.

101 Ibid., 35.

102 Ibid., 32.

103 Ibid., 41.

104 Ibid., 41.

Amos's Idea of Justice and the Concept of Covenant

What is the root of Amos's message of justice? Which Israelite tradition does Amos use for his denunciation of Israel ruling elite? It is commonly held that "the forms and substance of Amos's message were deeply rooted in the religious traditions of Yahwism and were not merely the unprecedented innovations of a creative mind."¹⁰⁵ John H. Hayes states that "there is nothing especially creative in Amos's preaching."¹⁰⁶ He said that "there is no evidence in the book that the relationship between Yahweh and Israel was understood in terms of covenant theology at the time."¹⁰⁷ However, this view has received some tough opposition.

Bruce C. Birch describes well the debate on this issue that has taken place in the scholarly literature over recent years.

In the pre-exilic prophets the term covenant (*berit*) appears only in Hos.6:7; 8:1 and Isa.24:5 as a term for Israel's relationship to Yahweh. This has led some to argue that the covenant imagery was not introduced into Israel until the Deuteronomic reform in 621 B.C.E. and was not the basis of earlier prophetic indictment against Israel. Others argued that the presence of covenant-related vocabulary (e. g., justice and righteousness) and the imagery of Exodus and desert experiences imply the covenant relationship.¹⁰⁸

105 Ward, J.M., "Amos", Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Supplementary Volume)(Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 23.

106 Hayes, John H., Amos, His Time and His Preaching: The Eighth Century Prophet (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 38.

107 Ibid., 38.

108 Birch, Bruce C., Let justice roll down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 245-246.

Birch said that "it may well be that the term 'covenant' itself was not a common summation term for this matrix of community concepts until Deuteronomy, but this should not prevent us from noting the prophet's role in advocating a conception of obligation in relationship to God that is covenantal in character."¹⁰⁹ Therefore, it is admissible to speak of the prophet Amos as a representative of God in the covenant relationship even in the eighth century when the term "covenant" is rarely used.¹¹⁰ Awareness of the dependency of Amos's message on the covenant tradition has already prompted significant progress in interpreting the prophetic message. "The approach of the present commentary is that covenant-theology is fundamental to Amos, even where technical terms may not be present."¹¹¹

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid., 247.

111 Douglas Stuart, in his commentary, said that "the covenantal perspective governs the content [of Amos] to a substantial degree" see Stuart, D.K., Hosea-Jonah (Waco: Word, 1987), 288; In Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman's Amos commentary, they describe Israel as having failed its covenant obligation to Yahweh which is the ultimate test of true religion. "Amos's message of judgment is based on Israel's violation of a covenant commitment to the God of justice" see Andersen, Francis I. and Freedman, David Noel., Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 91-93; Gerhard F. Hasel presents some scholars who are convinced that the correct way to understand the message of Amos is against a covenant background and that his message is shaped by covenantal thought. see Hasel, Gerhard F. Understanding the Book of Amos: Basic Issues in Current Interpretation (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 73-74. I.e., N. Seilhamer; David Allan Hubbard mentioned that "Amos never uses the word 'covenant' to describe the bond between Yahweh and Israel, but the concept of such an alliance seems to serve as foundation for many of his chief emphases. see Hubbard, David Allan, Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1989), 122; "The term "covenant" does not occur because "the covenant as a concept was so axiomatic as to be the base from which Amos, and all prophetic preaching proceeded." See "Dumbrell, W.J., Covenant & Creation An Old Testament Covenantal Theology (Devon: The Paternoster Press, 1984), 168.

Amos employs speech forms to express indictment and trial of Israel because of an unfulfilled covenant obligation. The obligation of this covenant stands as a concrete sign of Israel's trust in Yahweh and an expression of its gratitude for being delivered. This response of Israel connects the proclamation of God's liberation through the exodus by observing those obligations of covenant life that ensure social justice. However, the exploitation of the *minjung* by the ruling class, the manipulation of justice and the economic ills are all the result of covenant breach. Amos's insistence upon a positive demonstration of covenant relationships takes essentially the divine demand for justice and righteousness and also God's special concern for the *minjung*. Covenant faithfulness required of Israel the effort to embody justice and righteousness in systemic structures. It goes without saying that for Israel, a life characterized by justice and righteousness must show special regard for the *minjung*. However, it is because justice and righteousness are ignored or despised that Amos must announce that the covenant is broken. As a result, the relationship with Yahweh is sundered and the society suffers from this sin.

Amos's Idea of Justice and the Covenant Code

The Covenant Code, sometimes called the Book of the Covenant, refers to Exod. 20:22 to 23:33. The Book of the Covenant represents a consciously collected law code and it refers to the written stipulations of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. George Fohrer observes that the

Covenant Code originated in the early period of the monarchy, about the ninth century and it did not come into being in Judah but rather in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the home of the "Elohist."¹¹²⁾

On the question of analyzing the different forms in the Book of the Covenant through the form-critical observation, there are two stylistic forms in it: one is the *mishpatim* (ordinances) in 21:1-22 and the other is the *debarim* (words) in 20:22-26; 22:27-29; 23:10-16. "The *mishpatim* had the casuistic form of case law and regulated the secular affairs of an economic and social order. In contrast, the *debarim* were given in a direct, apodictic style, and dealt with matters of a cultic and moral nature."¹¹³⁾ According to A. Alt's study of the legal forms of Israelite law, the casuistic law form had its setting in the secular case law of the Ancient Near East but the apodictic formulation of the direct imperative arose out of the unique covenantal setting of early Israel.¹¹⁴⁾ The *mishpatim* start in Exod. 21:1 with a superscription and continue to Exod. 22:16 in a casuistic style. The conclusion part of the Book of the Covenant, Exod. 23:22-33 is a secondary phrenetic addition. B.S. Childs said that this concluding part did not belong to the original layer of the law, but rather is a redactional addition.¹¹⁵⁾ In order to discuss Amos's use of the Covenant Code. I want to concentrate on just the *debarim*, the form of which is dominated by the second person singular imperative apodictic form.

The following outline of the Book of the Covenant is given by B.S.

112 Initiated by Sellin, Ernst., rewritten by Fohrer, Georg., translated by Green, David E., Introduction to The Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 137

113 Childs, B.S., The Book of Exodus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 452.

114 Alt, Albrecht, Essays on Old Testament History and Religion (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 88-132.

115 Childs, B.S., op. Cit., 454.

Childs.¹¹⁶⁾

1. Altar law - 20:22-26
2. Slave law - 21:1-11
3. Capital offenses - 21:12-17
4. Laws regulating bodily injuries - 21:18-36
5. Damage to property - 22:1-17
6. Miscellaneous religious and social stipulations - 22:18-31
7. Laws regulating court procedure - 23:1-9
8. Cultic calendar - 23:10-19
9. Parenetic epilogue - 23:20-33

Exodus 22:18-27 in the miscellaneous religious and social stipulations treat of various forms of oppression against the poor and weak. The stranger (*ger*) was vulnerable to wrong-doing because he lacked the protection of his clan. The widow (*'almana*) and the orphan were exposed to violence without the support of husband and father.¹¹⁷⁾ These three typical groups of persons who might find themselves in a miserable situation are the representative powerless people in the Old Testament. However, God places himself directly in the role of special protector of this people by threatening to hear their outcries against their oppressors. The striking point is that God will intervene on the behalf of the poor against oppressor, and divine judgment is characterized as an act of grace toward the people of the *minjung*.

The laws Regulating Court Procedure (Exod.23:1-9) deal with the prohibition of various abuses which were connected with the court. Exodus

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 460.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 478.

23:4-5 demands the establishment of justice in the court for the poor and the stranger, those who are especially vulnerable to acts of abuse and injustice. At verse 8, the bribe, the blatant cause of injustice, is denounced. Verse 9 repeats the special concern for the stranger and reminds us of the fact that Israelites were slaves under the Egyptian bondage.

The last verses of the Book of the Covenant are concerned with the cultic calendar. Exodus 23:10-19 is closely paralleled in both form and content to Exodus 34:18-26. A. Alt points out that "the purpose of the fallow year was not economic but religious."¹¹⁸ The Feast of Tabernacles in the sabbatical year had a special meaning:

. . . the origin of the proclamation of the apodictic law, placing an obligation on the whole nation, at the Feast of Tabernacles, is a regular renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel of which they were conscious as the very source of their national life.¹¹⁹

The sabbatical year was probably understood in Israel's faith to mean that the land belonged to Yahweh. However, the ancient law tradition of the sabbath day and sabbatical year must be understood from the background of an rural society. Leaving some volunteer crops in each district for the poor created a welfare institution. The sabbath was primarily for Israel a day of rest devoted to Yahweh (Exod. 20:10), but it became a day of rest for the benefit of all employees and dependents. We must pay attention that the most striking thing about the fallow year and sabbath laws of the Book of the Covenant is the great concern for protecting the rights of the weak and the powerless.

¹¹⁸ Alt, A., op. Cit., 128.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 129.

The following chart compares instances of the apodictic form of law in the Book of Covenant and the message of Amos:

Miscellaneous religions and social stipulations (Exod.22:18-31)

<p>. 22:21 (Lev.19:33; 25:38; Deut.24:10-13; 26:5-9) You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.</p>	<p>. Amos 2:10 I brought you up out of the land of Egypt. . Amos 9:7 . . . Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt</p>
<p>. 22:22-24 (Deut.24:17-22) You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry: my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphan.</p>	<p>. Amos 4:1 . . . you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria who oppress the poor, who crush the needy. . . . Amos 5:11 you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, Amos 8:4 . . . you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land</p>
<p>. 22:25-27 (Lev.25:35-37, Deut.23:13,17; 23:19-20; 24:10-13) If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. If you take your neighbor's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbor's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.</p>	<p>. Amos 2:6-7 . . . they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth . Amos 8:6 buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, Amos 2:8 they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. . .</p>

Laws regulating court procedure (Exod.23:1-9)

<p>. 23:2-23 (Lev.19:15; Deut.16:18-20)</p> <p>You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to prevent justice; nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit.</p>	<p>. Amos 5:10</p> <p>They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.</p>
<p>. 23:6-8 (Deut.16:18-20; 27:25)</p> <p>You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.</p>	<p>. Amos 5:7</p> <p>. . . You turned justice to wormwood and bring righteousness to the ground.</p> <p>. Amos 5:12</p> <p>. . . you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate</p> <p>. Amos 5:15</p> <p>. . . establish justice in the gate</p> <p>. Amos 6:12b</p> <p>you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into worm wood-</p>
<p>. 23:9 (Lev.19:33; 25:38; Deut.24:10-13; 26:5-9)</p> <p>You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.</p>	<p>. Amos 2:10; 9:7</p>

Cultic calenda (Exod.23:10-19)

<p>. 23:13(23:24-25; 32-33)</p> <p>Be attentive to all that I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips.</p>	<p>. Amos 5:26</p> <p>You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves</p> <p>. Amos 8:14</p> <p>Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria and say, "As your god lives, O Dan." and, "As the way of Beer-sheba lives" - they shall fall, and never rise again.</p>
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Amos's Idea of Justice: Conclusions

As a messenger of God, Amos delivered his judgment speech that the doom is coming. His accusations of the ruling class of Israel could be understood as the reason for the doom pronounced by Yahweh. Because the ruling class did not do what Yahweh wanted them to do, which was known from the legal tradition in ancient times, Amos announced the doom of Yahweh over the oppressors and exploiters as a historical catastrophe. Another words, social injustice was, for Amos, the major reason for the divine punishing intervention. Amos did not announce a kind of new social reform program. Instead, Amos recognized social injustice, matched it against the justice of God, and used the contradictions he found as the foundation of the doom.

Israel believed its well-being to be permanently guaranteed by Yahweh. But if tradition declared 'You only have I known of all the

nations of the world', Amos added in Yahweh's name 'therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities (3:2), 'The end has come upon my people Israel' (8:2; cf. 5:2).¹²⁰⁾

Amos was the prophet who broke the false traditionalism which believed that Yahweh automatically guaranteed Israel's destiny as permanent.¹²¹⁾ He judged the life of Israel in relation to the perception of the nature of Yahweh. It is a radically theocentric understanding of Israel's existence. As the people of Yahweh, Israel was commanded to live in single-minded obedience to the claims of Yahweh. "Israel's election is understood as Israel's vocation, that is, something which had to be realized in Israel's life as a society."¹²²⁾

However, Jose' Porfirio Miranda tries to find the foundation of the eighth-century prophet's announcement of Yahweh's rejection of Israel in the original connection between the laws and Yahweh, not in the theology of covenant.¹²³⁾ For Miranda, the existence of the covenant in the eighth century is unknown. He believes that covenant theology was introduced at a later date but the "Code of the Covenant" existed before the theology of the covenant. Miranda sensed that all the biblical legislation, whether it was casuistic or apodictic, originally had the purpose of looking after the rights of the neighbor and for this purpose Israel adopted the already existing laws which seemed the most just even though which were originally Canaanite laws.¹²⁴⁾ He asserts that at Exod. 18, Israel already has

120 Nicholson, Ernest W., God and His People: Covenant Theology in the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 206

121 Ibid., 208.

122 Ibid., 210.

123 Miranda, Jose' Porfirio., op. cit., 141-142.

124 Ibid., 143.

laws before there is any mention of Sinai. Therefore, Miranda points out that "Israel's adoption of laws was originally connected with the libertarian (Exodic) tradition and the laws were 'adopted' in order to do justice between a man and his neighbor (Exod. 18:16)."¹²⁵ Miranda's observation is that the law called *mishpat* is rooted in the Exodic tradition, not the Sinaitic and for him, this fact is of utmost importance. Miranda described the theophany of the Exodic-libertarian tradition just as the later Sinaitic tradition had its well-known theophany.¹²⁶ The most authentic and primordial theologization of the laws was made by connecting them with the characteristic essence of the God called Yahweh as he revealed himself when he broke into human history to save the oppressed from injustice. The laws in Exod. 22:20-26, which we have been analyzing, are a paradigmatic example of this. "Affliction in 3:7 (theophany) and in 22:20 (law); "oppression" in 3:9 (theophany) and in 22:20 (law); "outcry" in 3:7,9 and in 22:22 (thrice),²⁶; "hear" in 3:7 and in 22:22,26; "my people" in 3:7 and in 22:24; "Egypt" in 3:7,8,9 and in 22:20. And still the law, to make Yahweh's essential characteristic even clearer, summarizes everything at the end: "because I am compassionate" (with the root *hnn*, so that no one can fall back on the idea of covenant).¹²⁷

According to Miranda, the sin of Judah and the sin of Israel are unquestionably the same sin: that both kingdoms failed to keep the law of Yahweh which is exclusively supposed to realize the justice of Yahweh on behalf of the oppressed. Miranda clearly said that "the authentic law of Yahweh was the continuation and crowning point of the great act for

¹²⁵ Ibid., 144-145.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 145.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 149.

justice's sake with which God intervened in our history to free the oppressed and establish justice on earth."¹²⁸)

At any rate, it is impossible to doubt that Amos's announcement of Yahweh's rejection of Israel is directly caused by her oppression of the *minjung* and the exploitation of the *minjung*. Therefore, Israel's injustices against the *minjung* are the direct and exclusive reason for Israel's rejection by Yahweh. Israel's election is destroyed because of her injustice.

Up to now, we have discussed Amos' notion of justice in connection with the covenant tradition. Here we must turn to some conclusions about Amos's theme of justice. I want to posit some theological premises in order to summarize Amos's notion of justice.

The first premise is that justice for Amos is the very essence and nature of Yahweh. Undoubtly it is true in the Old Testament that Yahweh is regarded as the *sophet*, who brings justice.¹²⁹) As Miranda has commendably undertaken to demonstrate, the correct meaning of the verb *saphat* is that "to do justice to the weak and oppressed" and "to save from oppression" not "to judge".¹³⁰) If Miranda's point is right, we can say that Yahweh as *sophet* is the defender of the oppressed and guardian of justice. Miranda has rightly pointed out that because of the characteristic essence of Yahweh, he broke into the oppressive human history to save the oppressed from injustice. Therefore, Yahweh's saving deeds for the oppressed define justice, and Amos believed that Israel is related to Yahweh who governs the world according to her/his nature of justice.

The second premise is this: for Amos justice is the liberation of

128 Ibid., 155.

129 Ps. 13:2; 22:25; 27:9; 30:8; 37:5-6; 44:25; 69:18; 88:15; 97:2; 102:3; 104:29; 146:7.

130 Miranda, op. cit., 113.

Israel's *minjung* from their oppression. According to Amos, Israel has failed Yahweh totally as the recipient of divine justice and her total failure with Yahweh is precisely caused by its oppression of Israel's *minjung*. Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:11,12; 8:4 show us obviously the oppression of Israel's *minjung* by the ruling elite. Therefore Amos warns that Israel cannot expect "the day of Yahweh" with joy. Instead it will be disastrous for the ruling elite. Amos asserts that Yahweh of justice will act to put an end to the injustice and oppression in its midst. On the other hand, however, it will be definitely the divine intervention for the liberation of the oppressed themselves. Amos's condemnation is rooted in Yahweh's revelation of her/himself in the liberation of the Exodus. The God of justice is "the God of Exodus" who is allied with the oppressed and poor, not with the ruling elite, and whose ears and heart are open to the cries of the oppressed. Therefore, we would say that *mishpat* is the liberation of the oppressed and doing justice on behalf of the poor.

The third premise is that: justice is the divine judgment against the oppressor. The covenantal relationship between God who has been faithful to Israel and the people of God who have failed their God is broken now and Amos announces God's necessary judgment on Israel's sin against the people of powerless. The prophet Amos reminded Israel that Israel as the people of God already experienced the faithfulness of their God. Let us hear what Amos said:

Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. (Amos 3:1-2)

The justice of Yahweh has not been reflected in her/his people's justice and then Yahweh's angry judgment is announced as the death of Israel :

Fallen, no more to rise, is maiden Israel; forsaken on her land,
with no one to rise her up (Amos 5:2)

The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again
pass them by (Amos 8:2b)

For Amos, the justice of Yahweh is based on Yahweh's solidarity with the oppressed and against the oppressors for justice's sake; moreover, it is a divine judgment against injustice for the triumph of justice.

The last theological premise is that justice of Amos is a social justice in the actual circumstance of social injustices. What was it in Israelite society that provoked Amos to cry for justice for the sake of the *minjung*? What was it that Amos identified as the contradiction of the justice he had in mind? Social injustice was the major reason for Amos's indictment. According to the justice of Yahweh, the powerful must not oppress the powerless, but use power in concern for the rights and welfare of the weak and poor. The court must not pervert the justice due to the poor, but establish justice. Amos's primary point of attack, however, was definitely the oppression and exploitation of the *minjung* which was deeply involved with social injustices. In such a time of fertility, the *minjung* lost of their land and they were deprived their status and rights. They had to become serfs or wage laborers to live. On the contrary the ruling elite could accumulate estates and use these to generate surplus wealth. Amos has a great amount of description about the luxurious and extravagant life of the elite class "who feels secure on the mount of Samaria." Let me repeat it. These elite built houses of hewn stone and kept summer and winter houses, collected furniture inlaid with ivory, owned large vineyards.

The bejeweled women spend most of their time for lavish entertainment and leisure with the best meat and wine. However, Amos proclaimed that Yahweh of justice will wage war against them as a warrior and will turn their extravagant festivity to woeful funeral. "For oppression, war. For revelry, wailing."¹³¹) Treatment of the miserable people in the society is, for Amos, the fundamental criterion of the achievement of the justice of Yahweh.

131 Coote, *op. cit.*, 16. Coote said these four terms sum up the whole basic message of the prophet Amos.

Chapter IV

The Relevance of Amos's Message in Modern Korea

It is time to respond to the question of what the Korean churches could learn from the message of Amos about their role in Korean society. Most of all, the Korean churches should learn that Amos refers to the poor peasant as the righteous. For Amos, the righteous were no longer identified with the rich, healthy, and prosperous but with the poor and needy. This identification of the righteous is essentially grounded on Amos's notion of justice and a radically opposite understanding of the poor to the Israelites of the eighth century, B.C.E. Amos proclaimed that the God of justice is the vindicator of the oppressed and is compassionate to the poor. The oppression of the poor and the crushing of the needy was the only major reason for the coming of the doom of Yahweh (Am. 4:1-2), and the place where Amos speaks about social injustice was the foundation of the doom. In other words, the mistreatment of the marginal people in society is the divine criterion of the doom. Amos pointed to a hidden correlation between people's relation to their neighbor and their relation to Yahweh of justice. God's justice is manifested in her/his retribution to all people and nations according to their social dealings with other people.

According to Amos's understanding of the covenant relationship the justice of Yahweh must be realized by living together with others in a social context. This web of all relationships of human life - monarch with people, judge with complainants, family with tribe, the community with the resident alien, the rich and the poor, and all with the God of justice - constitutes the world of *shalom*. Good relationships with other people are

the sign of the right relationship with Yahweh as well as the means by which to live justly within the community. However, for Amos, the doom of Yahweh comes when these good relationships are totally broken. Amos proclaimed to the ruling elite of Israel that their fidelity to the God of justice must be manifest in right treatment for the poor and the oppressed. For Amos, social injustice was not simply a bad moral attitude but a social sin which destroys the covenantal relationships, and also can bring chaos to the good relationships within the society. The relationship to the *minjung* in society, especially, becomes the scale on which the justice of the whole society is weighed. According to Amos, when they are exploited or forgotten, neither worship of God nor many offerings to God can result in true religion.

Just like the Israelite *minjung* of the eighth century, B.C.E., the Korean *minjung* have been suffering from unbalanced economic growth that has produced wage exploitation, widening socio-economic gaps between people, political oppression, and the cultural alienation of human being from human being through all types of discrimination. Under these socio-economic and political life situations, Amos's message of justice for the *minjung* must be incarnated in the concrete historical conditions of modern Korea.

The apolitical mainstream of Korean Christians sometimes objects that *minjung* theologians get a disproportionate share of political attention and try to represent society as a harmonious entity in which all problems can be solved since the civilian Administration inaugurated in 1993. From this point of view, conflict situations are usually ignored and the *minjung* are called unfortunate and become the objects of charity. However, in order to

be an important agent for social change in accordance with the justice of God, the majority of Korean churches must listen to Amos's accusation against the ruling elite. As Amos opposed the popular religious teaching that distorted true Yahwism, the Korean church should fight against the false consciousness of blessing and the righteous. If not, the Korean church cannot help but legitimate the existing distorted social order for the interests of the ruling class. The Korean church must restore the prophetic role and preach the message of justice that concerns the entire society.

Amos was not the founder of a new religion but he gave a new conception of Yahweh and his/her justice. What Amos had to say to the governing people of Israel was to return to a true Yahwism founded on the understanding that Yahweh is the agent who acts according to justice.¹³²⁾ Amos was the advocate for the peasant *minjung*, the people who had been exploited, losing their property and all human rights thus, becoming powerless and helpless. His basic concern was to point out the socio-economic injustices imposed on Israel's *minjung*. His conviction was that Yahweh takes the side of the peasant *minjung* as their vindicator and is the only one who can restore the position of true human being to the peasant *minjung* and bring judgment to the oppressor of the *minjung* according to Yahweh's justice.

What is new in his message was that Yahweh who acts in the world chooses justice and tilts the balance of power by giving leverage to human beings to make Yahweh's justice known.¹³³⁾ The doing of justice is taking the cause of the poor and the needy. Here there is no division

132 Coote, op cit., 40.

133 Ibid., 41.

between faith and the doing of justice. The justice of God combines non-exploitation of the *minjung* and it is not the application of individual faith, but its substance; without it, Yahweh's justice remains unknown. This is why Amos sensed the suffering of the Israelite *minjung*, opposed the existing power and sought social justice. His message of justice justified and supported all his practices in economy, social affairs, and religion.

Therefore, through the message of Amos, the Korean church can get a greater sense of responsibility for social change, not just for the reinforcement of the stability of Korean society. By the given concrete instances of social justice and injustice in the lives of people, the Korean church takes away the dualistic bias between the sacredness and the secularity, and makes the justice of Yahweh alive in our present social situation. The Korean church needs not only to recognize that the *minjung* has equal rights to the goods of God's creation, but also needs to actively engage in securing these goods for the sake of Yahweh's justice. In spite of the gap between the social world of the eighth-century B.C.E. and the centralized monarchy of Northern Israel, and modern Korean society, the Yahweh who spoke long ago as one compassionate to the oppressed and a vindicator of the poor remains the Yahweh of the *minjung* in modern Korean society. Therefore, the orthopraxis of *mishpat* must be taken on by the Korean church and also is the place for verifying our faith in the God who liberates the *minjung* by establishing *mishpat* on behalf of the *minjung*.

Epilogue

Through Amos's message of social justice, the Korean church is able to establish a firm foundation for the present role of the Korean church in the area of social involvement and provide a steadfast biblical foundation for the principle of Christian orthopraxis in its socio-economic context. The message of Amos must be understood as Yahweh's demand for liberation of the *minjung* from all kinds of oppressive and dehumanizing exploitation and discrimination in the modern Korea. Therefore, the mission of the Korean church is to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"¹³⁴⁾ in our socio-economic life situations. The Korean church must see herself primarily as an agent of Yahweh's justice for liberating the *minjung*, which is also able to liberate the anti-*minjung* from their position of oppressing the *minjung*. There is no neutral place available for the Korean church to have full realization of the justice of God. To avoid making a decision to stand for one side or the other is already to take a side. Keeping neutrality or becoming a silent partner of false consciousness is nothing other than sanctioning, legitimating, and reinforcing the *status quo* in Korean society.

Some people say that *Minjung* theology is an anachronistic theology under the free democratic society of the civilian administration and that Korean society does not need *Minjung* theology any more. In my view, however, this judgment is an anachronistic determination. Its proponents have to recognize the recent retrogressive crisis of Korean society, especially the socio-economic situation. By placing material value at the apex of the

134 Amos 5:24

hierarchy of values during the past few decades, it has created an aversion to the most ordinary people and a sense of deprivation in between each social stratum. Moreover, they should accept the fact that the vestiges of the long-lasting authoritarian system cannot be swept away overnight. Paradoxically speaking, now is the best time to produce the *Minjung* theology in order to develop an egalitarian society in accordance with the justice of Yahweh. More than anything, *Minjung* theology is strongly needed. The symptoms are already there. For example, many Christians have already been seriously inquiring about the genuine church's role as light and salt in the world, and have been actively involved in fighting against corruption. From the foundation of *minjung* theological insights, many Korean churches are re-examining the ecclesiastical traditions and identifying defects in need of self-purification, such as: pride in bigness authoritarianism of pastors excessive stress on tithing that produces burdens lack of social concern denominationalism and a shamanistic and materialistic way of ministry.

In conclusion, even though *mishpat* is the central message of Amos and it is essential to the Hebrew Bible, it is impossible to view the notion of justice in isolation from a host of other concepts such as *hesed* (steadfast love), *rahamin* (mercy) or *shalom* (peace), because the justice of Yahweh is not in contrast to these other covenant qualities. In God, justice and mercy are not opposition, but, as Heschel states: "God is compassion without compromise; justice, though not inclemency."¹³⁵ Furthermore, *mishpat* should bear witness to our passionate engagement in the effort to realize a measure of *shalom* on earth. It that *shalom* is to be the content

135 Heschel, Abraham J., op cit., 16.

of the wholesome interaction that will take place among all people, we may ask how the *minjung*'s subjecthood emerges in accordance with Yahweh's demand of *mishpat*. However, this study leaves room for an investigation of this question in the future.

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